

**The Maggie L. Walker
Governor's School for Government & International Studies
Regional Board Meeting**

Attendance

August 16, 2007

9:00 a.m.

Superintendents

Present:

Janet Crawley, Charles City County
Marcus Newsome, Chesterfield County
Stewart Roberson, Hanover County
Fred Morton, Henrico County
Richard Layman, King & Queen
J. Roy Geiger, New Kent County
James Victory, Petersburg City
Bill Craig, Powhatan County (Representing Margaret Meara)
R. Francis Moore, Prince George County
Deborah Jewell-Sherman Richmond City

Absent:

Others Present:

N. Douglas Hunt, Director
Joyce H. Charity, Clerk

Board Members

Present:

Barbara Crawley, Charles City County
Dianne Pettitt, Chesterfield County
Ivan Mattox, Goochland County
John Axselle, Hanover County
Eileen Long, King and Queen County
Teresa Lindsay, New Kent County
Kenneth Pritchett, Petersburg City
Hugh Mumford, Prince George County
Lisa Dawson, Richmond City

Absent:

Valarie Ayers, Powhatan County

Minutes
The Maggie L. Walker Governor's School for Government & International Studies
Regional Board Meeting

Thursday, August 16, 2007

9:00 a.m.

I. Call to Order

John Axselle Chairman of the Board, called the meeting to order.

II. Introductions and Recognition

Each Board member introduced him or herself and stated their locality.

III. Approval of Amended Agenda

On motion by Lisa Dawson, seconded by Barbara Crawley, Item A under Action Agenda items was moved to h. Motion carried.

IV. Approval of Minutes

On motion by Kenneth Pritchett, seconded by Diane Pettitt, the minutes of the June 21, 2007 meeting were approved. Motion carried with one abstention – Lloyd Jackson.

V. Public Comments

Bill Yates, Parent, City of Richmond.

"Good morning. My name is Bill Yates and I am a resident of the City of Richmond. I spoke to you at the April 19th meeting. I've come before you today because I felt, after that April meeting, that this Board was taking an open, unbiased approach to the questions of racial composition at Maggie Walker. It was stated in that meeting that you didn't know if any problem exist in the Maggie Walker admissions' procedures, but that a study or review should result in either a 'clean bill of health' or suggestions for improvement.

As the admission information for the 2007-08 incoming class has come in, it seems that efforts to encourage minority attendance are having positive effects, at least in the city, right? Richmond has tripled the number of African Americans offered admission to Maggie Walker, going from four to 12 in the last year. In addition, when one looks at the available seats in gifted programs for high school students in Richmond, minorities hold 131 out of 205 seats in the 9th grade this year (64%). It is clear that minorities are much better represented that it has been suggested by some people to this Board. Given that progress, and the tone of the discussion in April, I was honestly surprised to see the draft RFP which was presented to this Board in June. To me, it seems that major flaws exist in the document – flaws which change the mission of this study. I believe the document turns the study from an unbiased review of practices, into a virtual indictment of the admission processes here at Maggie Walker.

Three minutes of comment time won't allow me to spell out all the different comments and specific content language that we are concerned about. But we can see when we review this document that the persistent and flagrant flaws share these characteristics. First, there is an assumption in that document that a problem exists. Second, there is an assumption that the problem lies foremost with Maggie Walker and not in the elementary or middle school preparation, or other areas. Third, there is a reliance on feelings and anecdotal information, rather than empirical data – a lot of interviews talk to the students, but not looking at their

longitudinal data – that is too much qualitative not enough quantitative analysis. Fourth, a failure to request analysis of possible negative effects that any changes might cause. These might include: (a) effects on non-minority students; (b) the effect on the curriculum; (c) the effect on unprepared, but accepted students and the possible creation of an ‘underclass’ within the school. Fifth, vagueness and doublespeak – for example: ‘blending of gifted criteria and expectations with diversity.’ I don’t know what that means. And, then I think the rush to action – not enough time is given to the consultant to do this properly. I submitted a revised version and I think it covers many of these concerns and I would ask that you support this and thank you very much for all your support to Maggie Walker High School. Thank you!”

Paul Fleisher – Richmond Peace Education Center.

“Good morning everybody. I am speaking representing the Richmond Peace Education Center and I came here this morning prepared to commend the Board for moving on this issue at last. Apparently, there is some discussion about that not happening today, which upsets me greatly. I noticed in Mr. Yates’ letter in the third paragraph it says there is a question about whether significant differences exist among qualified minority and non minority students. Well, I am a Henrico resident and Henrico for the past couple of years have been an embarrassment to this Board and to Henrico. There are zero Black students from Henrico admitted to this school in the last two years – zero. Despite the fact that, as the paper just noted, Henrico has become a majority minority school system at this point. Working to increase diversity and striving for excellence are not incompatible goals. They are not incompatible. I spent 27 years teaching in Richmond Public Schools – I know that for a fact. It is a difficult problem as you have noted. It is something that requires more than a one time fix. The Superintendents’ proposal gives this Board a place to start. As I just read a literature review by Dr. Stim Hagan from Merc, he says and indicates it’s only a start. That you are right to look beyond admissions for preparation of potential students at younger grades and the dissemination of information about this school to families so more children will be aiming towards a high school career here. And, if this Board is genuinely committed to making Maggie Walker School open to highly qualified students from all racial and ethnic backgrounds; then as the Stim Hagen study indicates, you will have to continue to examine enrollment figures and make adjustments to this criteria and other school procedures on a regular basis as needed. It is not a one time fix. Dr. Martin Luther King once wrote a book entitled ‘Why We Can’t Wait.’ This Board has waited for two years to take action on this issue. While the issue has been around much longer than that, we have been speaking to this Board for two years. It is time to act. Two years of opportunity to correct Maggie Walker’s problem of racial inequity have passed two groups of students – two years of students have missed their opportunities to have a fair chance to participate in the great programs that are here. Maggie Walker’s Superintendents’ recommendations that are now before you to help Maggie Walker become a model for openness and equity among specialty schools, it’s time to move on it. It is time to allow consultants to begin their analysis so this Board can receive recommendations on how to proceed on this challenging problem as soon as possible. Thank you!”

Juliani Sidharta, Parent - Henrico County

“Mr. Chairman and Members of the Board: I am Juliiani Sidharta, an active school volunteer and mother of two Maggie Walker students – David, Class of ’06 and Jonathan, a rising senior. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you this morning. I live in diversity. I grew up and lived in countries such Indonesia, Malaysia, Australia, and the United States, where I am in the minority group, but I have a large multi racial/faith/national group of family and friends. We all agree that diversity in the student body of our school would be an asset socially and educationally. However, the means by which diversity is achieved is something we need to consider with care. Admitting less qualified African American students to take the place of more qualified students could create resentment rather than peaceful coexistence.

I don't see Maggie Walker's admission process as the cause for the lack of diversity. The school is designed for gifted students. Identifying gifted students occurs at a very early level in Henrico County. These students need continued nurturing and guidance to stay on course. Middle school programs have to stay challenging to keep them curious and excited about learning. We remind these students that 'it's cool to be smart.' These students are prepared academically and have good study habits prior to entering the rigorous program that Maggie Walker offers. Only then can they enjoy and take advantage of the academic challenges offered at Maggie Walker. Each school division should work on identifying gifted African Americans and prepare them through their system.

In the area of technology, it shouldn't be difficult to track where students choose to go to high school. For example, the Henrico data could show if African American gifted students are choosing to go the IB program rather than Maggie Walker. Students are known to have been accepted at Maggie Walker, but decide to go to other high schools due to extremely heavy social and peer pressure. I believe qualified African American students are prone to the same social and peer pressure. Let's be realistic, many middle school students think that Maggie Walker is mainly for geeks. Perhaps there are far simpler solutions to this lack of diversity at our school. Mike Geiger made the observations that having African American faculty and staff at open house for this year's accepted students seem to have helped prospective students decide to attend Maggie Walker. Phone calls encouraging accepted students to attend seem to have made a difference. These simple efforts are worth repeating. I hope at the next opportunity, alumni will work with and help their alma mater in recruiting potentially qualified African American students. Perhaps they could become club sponsors at Maggie Walker to encourage more interaction between students of all backgrounds. Can we depend on concerned and successful alumni, such as Genevieve Siegel-Hawley and Rasheeda Creighton, to help during open house to speak to prospective students? Even if, as Ms. Creighton said during the May Regional Board meeting she did not have such a great experience at the Governor's School, she could at least share the educational benefits she gained from having attended here."

David Ballard, Parent - City of Richmond

"Mr. Chairman, members of the Regional Board, Mr. Hunt, staff, parents, and guests. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you this morning. I have several points to make regarding the Board's consideration to offer an RFP for the study of the admissions process at Maggie Walker. First, Maggie Walker's mission is to provide a high school education for gifted students identified by the participating localities and selected by a rigorous testing process. This must continue to be the mission and the process used to identify students to attend Maggie Walker. I ask this Board to review the recommendations for changes to the RFP that have been submitted by the parents of students currently attending this school and to modify the 'Draft RFP' to include those recommendations that the Board feels will more accurately reflect the desired outcome of the consultant's study. Lastly, I ask the Board to move quickly as possible to advertise this RFP and complete the study in a reasonable time frame. This study will require a significant investment of time in order to interview all of the groups necessary to provide a complete evaluation of the admissions process. This study will capture the necessary data to support the merit-based admissions process and will produce recommendations for this Board and ultimately the participating localities to consider to ensure that every gifted student in the region has the opportunity to compete for a seat available at Maggie Walker. Thank you for your time and your hard work in support of this school and the students who attend Maggie Walker."

Victoria Tito, Parent – Henrico County

"Mr. Chairman and Board Members: My name is Victoria Tito. I live in Henrico County and my son, Greg, is a sophomore here at Maggie Walker. I have attended several recent school board meetings and have listened with interest to the discussion regarding hiring a consultant.

One question is why African American students don't want to attend Maggie Walker? The only reason I have heard given is that they do not feel welcome. I have a simple suggestion for the consultant: Talk to the Black students and parents who are currently here who presumably do feel welcome. The task for the consultant is to uncover the real reasons why African American students are not attracted to our school, rather than accept the easy excuse of not feeling welcome. Most students coming here as freshmen know very few others; they are eager to make friends and fit in themselves. Does it make sense to you that they would single out the Black students and shun them?

Another question is does Maggie Walker provide a niche for gifted African American students? What percentage of the pool of gifted students is Black? The percentage of Black students admitted to Maggie Walker should mirror this percentage in the gifted pool. If it does, you know that Maggie Walker is serving this subset of the African American pool. Maggie Walker exists to teach gifted students, not the general population.

Finally, where are the parents of gifted Black students? Every student here has a parent who was interested in finding the best educational match for his child. A child does not magically become gifted in the late elementary or middle school years. A parent of a gifted child knows his child is different from others much earlier. Of course, the easy choice is just to send your child to the local high school. Parents of this school have to be willing to make an extra effort. As Mr. Hunt astutely says, 'It's not just the students who joins the Maggie Walker community, but the entire family.' I urge you, the Board of our wonderful school, to insure that the money you are spending on a consultant is used in conversation with the Black community we are striving to attract. Please make sure that after all the investigating is done, the results will simply be that every gifted child who benefit from and wants to come to Maggie Walker will be given an equal opportunity to do so. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today."

Courtney Stewart – Student, City of Richmond

"Good morning, my name is Courtney Stewart and I am going to be a junior this year at Maggie Walker. In 2005, I chose Maggie Walker over my friends' school, which is Richmond Community High School. And, I knew that when I would graduate from here, I would have more opportunities than any other high school in the city of Richmond. I left all of my friends behind coming here and knew that I would make more friends here. Leaving my friends behind, from this point on, has been the best decision. With my leadership opportunities, such as Student Ambassador, officer in the United Sisters and Brothers Club, which is not just for African Americans, but all minorities and even the white children in this school, I feel that my perfect fit is in this school. Within these organizations, I have learned about other people and cultures as well as myself. I have come to realize that this school is going to prepare me for the real world and the percentage of ethnicities does not mimic the real world population; however, we all know that the process was challenging and some kids are not fit for the challenge. I think that is the biggest reason that there are not as many African/Americans in this school. We should not lower the bar to get in here, but informing students in the very beginning is the answer or could be the answer for the minority gap.

I have had several friends who did get in who were African Americans who toured and so they did not know any people who were going here and wanted to go here. There was also not enough extra curriculum activities such as a marching band or football team and no F.B.L.A., which is Future Business Leaders of America. They did not want to leave their friends and try something new. With this school, I have traveled to Japan and that would have never happened at any other school. All races were represented on this trip and we had a great time. This experience broaden my horizons on other cultures around the world. I also encountered these cultures everyday at this school. The decision to attend Maggie Walker has definitely been worth all the heart wrenching decisions, and I have always felt welcomed and I know almost everyone on staff

and they know that I have never felt ostracized or unwelcome or I felt like I don't fit in – I am not just some random student. I am Courtney and every ones knows me.

Stephen Leibovic – Parent, Henrico County

“This school is a source of pride in the secondary educational system of central Virginia. The school exists to cultivate the minds of the region’s most gifted and talented students. They are the cream of the crop and they deserve the excellent opportunities which this school affords them.

This school is made great by its mission, its teachers, students, administrators, and staff. Each of them is an active contributor to the environment that makes the school great and each of them helps those who attend it excel in their chosen fields. In order to maintain this greatness, you (the Board), other staff and educators, as well as officials in each of the jurisdictions which sends students here are charged with selecting the best and the brightest students who will benefit from and contribute to the great opportunities available here. It’s this selection process which is being called into question. There can be no argument that African American students are under-represented in the school in comparison to their numbers in the communities. The numbers speak for themselves and are indeed a source of consternation. The differences in accepted percentages among different races are stark, and demand an investigation and explanation. The Board is wise to address the issue. If in fact the admissions process, designed to identify the best and the brightest, instead injects race or social status into the decision process, this must be stopped. In our pluralistic society, there is no place for anything but race-blind admissions policies. So, I believe we must ask, in any consultant study: Is the admissions policy race blind? If it is not, how does race prejudice the selection process and how can this prejudice be eliminated? Does the current selection process identify the most gifted students in each locality in a race-blind fashion? If the answer to that question is yes (as it should be), can we or should we alter the selection process to consider race, socio-economic status or other non-academic criteria, and still be consistent with the Governor’s school mission to develop gifted student’s education, ability and understanding?

In asking how we increase the numbers of African American students admitted on their merit to the Governor’s school, we must look at the pre-high school preparation of different students who apply. We may find that the opportunity available in elementary and middle school, the strength of the community and family support, and childhood influences on sense of achievement and drive are all fundamental ingredients for preparation for a rigorous Governor school education. This may clearly point to a solution for the current inequities in racial representation.

We must not diminish the quality of the education available here. Accepting students who are anything but the best and the brightest will lower the standards of admission and of education. No, the solution to the racial inequity is to start much earlier than the day of the Governor’s school admissions’ decisions. Students from disadvantaged background, whether they be white, black, or any other color, must be cultivated early on to value education, to pursue education, and to excel. This is an important mission for our public education system and this is where money should flow and where influence should be used. To ignore potential talent, to not do our best to develop potential talent and giftedness, does a disservice to our students.

I urge the Board to ask the consultant to look carefully at how we can improve the preparation of disadvantaged students so that they can be allowed to excel at the Governor’s school and take advantage of all educational opportunities offered to them, on their own merits. But don’t lower the standards of admissions as this would defeat the very purpose of this school.”

Beth Bertnell – Henrico County

“Hello, my name is Beth Bertnell and I am from Henrico County. I just got one correction. I have a daughter who is a senior and one who will be an incoming freshman. And, one of her best

friends will be here with her from Henrico County and she is African American. So, I don't know the figures for the rest."

VI. Director's Report

Mr. Hunt reported that one of the counselors, who worked at the GS for two years and moved away, was scheduled to fill a vacant slot but now will not be coming on board due to family obligation. The staff is complete with a large number of new staff to the GS. A new student management system is being implemented this year, called Power School. This system will enable the GS to serve staff, parents, and students in a more efficient manner as information will be accessed quickly.

- a. Coming Events – See page 14 in the meeting packet.
- b. Comments – None

VII. Action Agenda Items

a. Internet Safety Program

On motion by Dianne Pettitt, seconded by Barbara Crawley, the Board approved the Internet Safety Program. Motion carried.

b. Technology Acceptable Use Standards for Staff

On motion by Kenneth Pritchett, seconded by Dianne Pettitt, the Board approved the Technology Acceptable Use Standards for Staff. Motion carried.

c. Technology Acceptable Use Standards for Students

On motion by Barbara Crawley, seconded by Ivan Mattox, the Board approved the Technology Acceptable Use Standards for Students. Motion carried.

d. Personnel

On motion by Dianne Pettitt, seconded by Lloyd Jackson, the Board approved the personnel action. Motion carried.

e. Grant Authority to Director to Certify MLWGS Crisis Plan

On motion by Lloyd Jackson, seconded by Kenneth Pritchett, the Board authorized the Director to certify MLWGS Crisis Plan. Motion carried.

f. Annual Board Authorization of Signatures

On motion by Dianne Pettitt, seconded by Barbara Crawley, the Board approved authorization for Philip Tharp, Coordinator of Administration, to sign documents in the absence of the Director. Motion carried.

g. Approve Transfer of Title from the Renovation Foundation to the Regional School Board

On motion by Ivan Mattox, seconded by Dianne Pettitt, the Board approved the transfer of title from the Renovation Foundation to the Regional School Board pending paper work from Pat Lacy, legal counsel for the Board. Motion carried.

h. Draft – Scope of Services, Time Frame and Selection Criteria for MLWGS Consultant, RFP

Mr. Hunt directed the Board to section 9, information section of the meeting packet, on page 25. He noted it was the scope of services presented with the parents' input for changes highlighted in red to the additions submitted for the Board's consideration. Also, there were copies of some letters received. He asked the Board to review these documents. On motion by Eileen Long, seconded by Ivan Mattox, that the Board defers action of this item based on the Chairman appointing a sub committee to meet prior to the next board meeting and report back with a revised RFP. Motion carried.

VIII. Materials for Board Review

The Board was directed to review the information in the meeting packet.

IX. Information

None

X. Superintendents' Steering Committee Meeting

None

XI. Closed Meeting

None

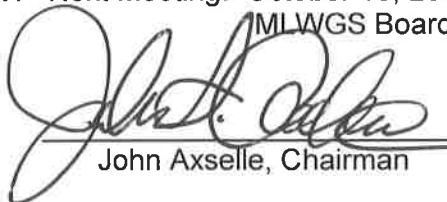
XII. Certification of Closed Meeting

None

XIII. Adjournment

On motion by Lisa Dawson, seconded by Dianne Pettitt, the meeting adjourned. Motion carried.

XIV. Next Meeting: October 18, 2007
MLWGS Board, 2nd Floor


John Axelle, Chairman


N. Douglas Hunt, Director